

AN IRISHMAN'S DIFFICULTIES WITH THE DUTCH LANGUAGE



BY

FOURTH EDITION

CUEY-NA-GAEL

ROTTERDAM - J. M. BREDEE.

BY THE SAME WRITER

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Thans kregen we de avonturen van O'Neill te hooren op een auto-tochtje, waarbij hij te gast gaat bij een vriendelijke boerensfamilie. O'Neill heeft razenden honger, maar tot zijn onuitsprekelijke verbazing krijgt hij niets te eten, ofschoon hij toch op elk vriendelijk aanbod even vriendelijk antwoordt: „dank u wel”, hierbij een getrouwe vertaling gevend van 't Engelsche: „thank you”, zonder echter 't verschil in beteekenis van beide uitdrukkingen te kennen.

Zijn belet vragen, zijn verwarring met biljet, en belet krijgen en geven, zijn avonturen met den Dagtrein, die altijd 's nachts gaat omdat het een D-trein is, een trein, die geen belet heeft en waarvoor geen belet gevraagd behoeft te worden, — het was alles niet om na te vertellen maar om het uit te gieren.

An Irishman's Difficulties with the Dutch Language

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J. M. BREDÉE'S BOEKH. EN UITGEVERS-MIJ.
ROTTERDAM

INTRODUCTION.

HAARLEM, March 1908.

Dear Cwey-na-Gael,

Thank you ever so much for the pleasure you gave me by sending me the account of your friend O'Neill's experiences in our country.

It is excellent fun and the whole thing is full of quiet humour.

It cannot but be highly appreciated by all Dutch people who are trying to master the difficulties of English, and often despair of finding the right word for the right place. To all such it will be quite a treat to see how their vernacular puzzled your fellow-countryman.

The booklet fully deserves a place in the libraries of our H. B. Schools and Gymnasiums, and is sure to find one there.

Wishing you all possible success with your publication,

I remain

Yours very truly,

C. HEYMAN.

For permission to give recitations or readings from this book application should be made to the Publisher.

CONTENTS.

	Page.
INTRODUCTION.	v
CHAPTER I.	
O'NEILL'S GREAT PLANS	1
CHAPTER II.	
GRAMMAR AND PHRASE BOOK.	6
CHAPTER III.	
THE RECITATIONS IN THE WOOD.	18
CHAPTER IV.	
THE PURCHASE OF THE PENS.	22
CHAPTER V.	
LOCAL COLOUR	31
CHAPTER VI.	
A WASH-LIST IN DUTCH	37

	Page.
CHAPTER VII.	
SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS	48
CHAPTER VIII.	
OUT FOR A WALK.	52
CHAPTER IX.	
THE QUEST OF MIJNHEER HIERNAAST. . . .	68
CHAPTER X.	
THE PARCEL POST.	77
CHAPTER XI.	
A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW	89
CHAPTER XII.	
DUTCH CORRESPONDENCE	100

CHAPTER I.

O'NEILL'S GREAT PLANS.

We were seated one November evening in O'Neill's rooms in Trinity College Dublin when the conversation turned on modern languages.

Each had his own story to tell, but we waited in vain for our host to unbosom himself on the subject of Dutch. Yet he was understood to have had thrilling experiences in the Hague in August.

By a few gentle hints we endeavoured to elicit from him some talk about his linguistic adventures, and, not succeeding very well, I at last asked him point-blank if he didn't find Dutch hard.

"Yes", said O'Neill promptly, in answer to my question. "Yes: it certainly is hard!" he repeated, as he balanced the poker, preparatory to smashing

the biggest piece of coal on the fire. "Why the whole thing's next to impossible!"

There was something in his tone that sounded promising. He had a grievance evidently against the language; and there was a sufficient amount of suppressed irritation in his voice to indicate that there might be entertaining disclosures at hand.

Jack O'Neill had worked too closely at his mathematics the winter before, and had taken a long holiday in summer. A month of this he had spent in Holland to master the Dutch language, he said, and get a good general acquaintance with Dutch Literature. These had been great plans, and we were naturally eager to learn how they had succeeded. We had seen, however, very little of Jack since his return, as he had been most of the time at his aunt's place in Connemara. Now that he was back at Trinity safe and sound, we naturally expected to get the news sooner or later. The conditions were so favourable that evening for a talker to spin his yarn, that we were all impatience for Jack to begin. We settled ourselves comfortably to listen; but he did not seem in a hurry to unfold this particular tale.

We had already heard from him a great deal

about William the Silent, and more than a great deal about Dutch art, but not a word about the Dutch language.

Our next-door neighbours, the "Professor" and the "Philosopher" — two students from the Cape who were working for their degree — were as interested as I was, in O'Neill's Dutch, and they used to drop in to hear what was going on.

It was the third evening they had called; and as it was clear that Jack was somewhat reticent about his "linguistics", we had to guide him gently to the subject.

"Nonsense!" I said again. "*You* had no difficulty. You made yourself understood from the first. You wrote me that."

"Well," said Jack, sitting bolt upright, "I know better now; and I stopped talking Dutch when I began to understand myself. You have to hunt in the dark," he explained, "to catch the exact word or the proper idiom — and a man likes to know what he is talking about, himself. The language isn't child's play, that's the truth. But it's a fine country. You should see the light when —"

"Oh," said the Philosopher, "we don't want to

hear any more about the country. Please not. We know all about those azure heavens and the infinite horizons and the scrubbed distances and the Rembrandt cattle, and all that. Why, man, I'll undertake to draw from your own rhapsodies about those pictures an absolutely correct copy of (say) Paul Potter's 'Night Watch', or van der Helst's 'Anatomy Lesson', or Mesdag's 'Lost-Chord', and the canals and the clouds and the *chiaro-oscuro*. You needn't go over them again".

"But I thought", piped the First year's man, who always came in with the Professor and never quite comprehended what was going on, "I thought that the 'Night Watch' was not by Paul Potter. Surely the 'Night Watch' and the 'Anatomy Lesson' are two well-known pictures by Remb —" "Never mind what you thought!" interrupted the Professor. "Don't think, it's bad for your constitution. And above all things don't try to be accurate, or you'll get yourself into trouble."

"The Philosopher's right," I urged. "Our minds are a chaos after O'Neill's descriptions. We'll only pardon you, Jack, all that golden haze and the Rembrandts, if you condescend to plain facts. Tell us now about your Dutch. Do. We're absolutely

thirsting for an account of your adventures. Or were you too timid to embark on the open sea of the *taal*, sticking cravenly to English all the time? Why I thought you had more *go*."

"Mr. O'Neill promised to master the language in the first fortnight", chimed in the First Year's man in his high boyish voice, "and to finish the principal Dutch classics in the second fortnight. Those were his very words."

CHAPTER II.

GRAMMAR AND PHRASE BOOK.

"Well", said O'Neill with a kind of sickly smile, "I didn't get so very much time, you see, either for the Literature or for the Language. Of course there was much sight-seeing, and — I spent a good deal of time over the pictures, which — —"

The Philosopher shut his eyes, heaved an audible sigh, but said nothing.

"And", continued Jack hastily without seeming to notice the interruption, "my efforts to speak Dutch were not always appreciated".

"Really?" said the First Year's man, with sudden interest.

"Go on", said the Professor, "now you're started".

"You soon left your hotel for lodgings?" I added enquiringly.

"Well, you see," he resumed, "I was afraid I'd never pick up the language. There is no change of practice unless you get away from everybody that speaks English. That was not too easy, I tell you. But Enderby helped me, and we searched about the Hague for two whole days. At last we found perfectly charming rooms opposite a canal; the landlady didn't know a word of English. She knew Dutch, though, all right. Fluent, did you say? I should think she was. A perfect marvel. No need of the dictionary, you know. — Verbs all in their proper places — and plenty of them!

Enderby told her all I required, and then went away. It was like being thrown into the sea, as you may guess; but I imagined I should soon learn to swim. There's nothing like being cast completely on your own resources, they say. Still it was a bit awkward at coffee-time, when the landlady came up and talked. She poured forth a rapid and resistless stream of friendly Dutch upon me, while I nodded in the intervals and tried to think. It was a very one-sided business. I was very hungry, too, and wanted luncheon. Now there was abundance of

this unequal kind of conversation, but no lunch in sight, so I — (remember I knew only *ja* and *neen*, and was not very sure of them, either) — I just pointed gracefully to my lips to indicate that I needed food. That produced an immediate effect — a torrent of eloquence forcibly delivered and ending with some enquiry about *biting*!

I shook my head and said "Neen, neen! You put it too crudely — luncheon — eat — eat."

"O *ja*," she replied, "best. Eten — eten om vijf uur — vijf." And she held out one hand with the fingers spread. It seemed to me she was swearing there was enough food in the house to satisfy a hungry Irishman.

"Good — so far," I returned. "*Ja, ja!*"

"En mynheer wil niet ontbijten?" she rejoined. This was the *biting* again, so I said decidedly, "Neen; niet bijte". She seemed surprised and a little hurt, but she said nothing and went away. And of course I had to fast until five o'clock.

This would never do, I felt; and that evening I bought the first grammar and dictionary I could lay my hands on at a second-hand bookstall in the Binnenhof.

They were antique looking volumes, most of

them there; and my books had a remarkably ancient aspect. But I was glad to find that I had completed the purchase of them without using one word of English. How? Oh, the method's very simple. You pick out some big book you don't want, and hold it up interrogatively.

You *can* hold up a book interrogatively, you know, with a little practice. Well, you lift some rubbishy, bulky volume that you wouldn't be paid to put in your library, and you give it a sort of enquiring wave in front of the vendor of these second-hand goods, and the vendor immediately understands your picturesque query to be "How much?" He answers promptly, and you as promptly drop the rubbishy fat volume, as if it was a scorpion: you sigh resignedly, raise your eyebrows and walk away disgusted.

That is the first step. That is to give him respect for your intelligence and to indicate your willingness to negotiate on reasonable terms.

The next step is different. You linger with an air of disdain at the tail-end of the bookstall; and, as an after-thought — just as you are moving off — you halt a moment and flick the particular work you do happen to want, with a careless forefinger or the

point of your walking-stick. At once the man talks, and you say "Nee".

He talks more. You say, "Neen, neen" and shake your head sadly. He talks still more, and gesticulates excitedly with the book in his hand. You wait till he stops for breath, then suddenly interject, "Ja; best," taking care to put down a large silver coin, — and the article is yours! The negotiation is over; and all you have to do is to gather up your purchase and a quantity of small silver and copper coins that you get as change. Then with a little patience at home and some arithmetic you can count out — approximately — how much the things have cost you. That's the way you buy second-hand books."

"I had no idea, Jack, you had such a genius for diplomacy," I murmured, as O'Neill evidently expected us to say something.

"Or for finance," added the First Year's Man.

"Did your medieval purchases do all for you that you expected?" enquired the Philosopher.

"Well, hardly," said Jack.

"After my first success I somewhat underestimated the difficulties of the idiom. But I worked hard at the grammar."

"Ah! a Grammar?" interrupted the Professor. "Did you say you acquired a Grammar? I am interested. Could you manage to describe those volumes now, if it's not too great a strain?"

"Oh, the books!" resumed O'Neill. "Well — there was a little fat Dictionary, closely printed, with Dutch into English and English into Dutch; and there was a handsome new Phrase-book in brilliant colours, containing conversations on the most unlikely topics. But I admit the Grammar Exercise-book was the gem of the collection. It was printed on a kind of dusky paper, something like blot-sheet, and it bore the date 1807. It had six hundred and thirty-one exercises, double ones, Dutch into English and English into Dutch — and contained many idioms, hints, exceptions, and explanations. In warnings, foot-notes, and asterisks it was particularly rich. Not a few pages were ornamented with *Nota Bene's* of various brands, with hands, large and small, drawing attention to them. The English of this manual was very odd, and by and by I got the impression that the Dutch was rather shaky too. Not that I guessed this at first, you may be sure; but it gradually dawned upon me.

I took a certain pride in my treasures, and set

about studying them with zeal. No doubt it was disappointing just at the beginning to read: *Nota Bene* — *No one but a Dutchman can emit this sound*; or this: "N. B. *.*. *This sound must be heard. It is something like U but cannot be otherwise described. It cannot be represented by any known letters. Foreigners need not try it.*"

But I skipped over these obstacles, mastered the verbs 'to be' and 'to have', in their elements, got an idea of the way to construct plurals and diminutives, and went to sleep content.

Next morning after breakfast — which by the bye came up all right, without any special effort on my part —, remembering that I needed pens and ink I determined to go out and buy them myself.

{ *Have you pens?*
Give me pens, please.
Thank you.

That is all I seemed to require.

Have you? Well; that is not so simple as it looks. I consulted the Grammar and was appalled to see the amazing variety of choice afforded to any one in Holland who contemplated asking this innocent question.

{	hebt gij	hebt U	hebt gij(lieden)
	hebt ge	heeft U	
	heb je	heeft UEdele	
	heb jij	heeft Ue	
		heeft Uès	

I looked carefully at this curious form. Yes, wherever it occurred, there were marks of parenthesis tied round the (lieden). How was I to pronounce those brackets? The vowels and the usual consonants I had learnt already were very trying. But what about those marks? Did they denote a cough, or a sneeze or gentlemanly tap of your foot on the ground? On the whole I thought I should best represent them by two graceful waves of the hand — one for each bracket.

{	hebt gij(lieden)	with brackets carefully fenced
		round the(lieden)
	hebt jullie	
	heb jelui	

I counted them over. There are twelve ways of saying *Have you* in Dutch. That was distinctly suggestive, it seemed to me at the first brush, of the twelve months of the year. You could begin in January with Hebt gij, in February you would have Hebt ge, and so you could work on through

the months, keeping your grammar and your chronology going, side by side, through the seasons till you would emerge safely near Christmas with Heb jelui. This theory was not without its attractions. But what would happen in passing, say, from June to July, if you forgot what day of the month it was? If it was July the first and you imagined it was June the thirtieth, you would be talking bad grammar! No: that would never do. My brilliant conjecture had soon to be abandoned as fanciful, and I was very sorry.

But the facts of the case were dead against the obvious chronological arrangement, though they were by no means easily grasped. There were asterisks and foot-notes to all these zodiacal forms; and a great deal of solid reading had to be gone through before you got at the relative force of any particular term. The erudition was distracting, and the warnings were positively alarming, but after much painstaking investigation I seemed to perceive three grand principles emerging."

"Yes?" we all said together, as O'Neill paused for breath. "And these were? —"

"In the first place," resumed Jack deliberately, checking off the principles upon his fingers.

I. "Never say je or jij to a man unless you mean to insult him."

II. In the second place, je and jij may be freely used on all occasions, if you only know how.

"But", said the First Year's Man, "you just said that..."

"And," continued O'Neill firmly, not heeding the interruption, "and you may use the Third Person of the verb for the Second and the Second for the Third; and you may use a Plural for a Singular and a Singular for a Plural; and you may use U for UE, and UE for UEdele; you use jij for je, and je for ge, and ge for gij, and you use jullie for gy(lieden) with brackets round the lieden; but no one now ever does say gy(lieden) with brackets round the lieden, except in poetry; and nobody in any circumstances ever uses UEdele except when dining with members of the Royal Family. Then you are allowed to utter this vocable once, and must maintain a discreet silence during the rest of the repast."

"Where do you get all that rubbish?" I asked in disgust.

"Boyton and Brandnetel", he answered glibly, "page 52."

"At least", he added, "it was something like that. That gives you a good general idea of the thing."

"When you are quite done with Boyton," said the Professor slowly, "when your education's finished, you know, I'll make you a reasonably high offer for that book. Boyton would relieve the tedium of my philological studies, I can see."

"Perhaps," interposed the First Year Incurable, "perhaps Mr. O'Neill's accuracy was all used up in his Artistic Studies. That would leave none for the grammar."

"That's a nice way to put it," said the Philosopher. "Please curb your imagination, O'Neill; stick as near to probability as you can — without too great pain to yourself — and we'll not be hard upon you. Wasn't there a third clear principle that emerged in the course of your investigations?"

"Oh, des", said O'Neill with some show of caution. "As nearly as I can remember, it was this:

III. Never say *jou*; and avoid *UE* except in correspondence. You are warned against any approach to familiarity in the use of pronouns. The courteous form is *UEdele*. *Gij* more respectful than *jij*. *Je* is a term of endearment."

"But," objected the First Year's Man, "it doesn't seem to hang together, for you said just now —"

"No debating allowed," growled the Philosopher.

"Hurry up, O'Neill, with those general principles."

"Oh, that's all of them," said Jack, "all at present." "Well, to resume my story, I picked out the most harmless of the *have you's*, and was proceeding to work out the formula for 'Have you pens,' when to my consternation my eye fell on a dreadful warning, a kind of threat.

N.B. Important! — The foreigner is distinctly given to understand that he must commit to memory some polite phrases before engaging in conversation (see page 201) and study the chief sentences of a good phrase book. All pronouns savouring of familiarity are to be carefully avoided.

CHAPTER III.

THE RECITATIONS IN THE WOOD.

You may be sure that made me rather diffident till I had mastered some of these 'polite phrases'. Polite they were, and no mistake — why French was nothing to it! — and I got the very nicest of them well into my head. I went round to Enderby's, and he put me on the way of pronouncing the words. Then I took a whole morning in Het Bosch and recited them to myself aloud. When no one was in sight I allowed myself some freedom of utterance; and once I thought I must have startled with my *ore rotundo* an artist who was plying his harmless calling unseen behind a clump of trees. At least some one retired very hastily after I had delivered, "Doe zooveel moeite niet", three times with a vigorous rising

inflection and four times with the falling inflection, followed in each case by the rhetorical pause. From the deserted easel I judged it must have been an artist. He withdrew at a good pace, and never once looked back.

These and similar polite idioms I repeated over some hundreds of times, till I knew them backwards and forwards and every way, and could have rattled them off in my sleep. Then there was some difficulty in avoiding the policemen in the wood. They kept prowling about after I had incautiously experimented on the first one with, "Mynheer! ik wensch U goeden morgen; ik hoop dat ik U niet stoor. Vaarwel." He had looked amazed at this; so, as a parting shot — a sort of courteous Good Bye — I added gaily, "Ik bid U maak geen complimenten." It was this that made the trouble, as he looked distinctly displeased, not to say suspicious. When he heard the words first, he had stood speechless, transfixed. Then he followed me home and hung about the street — I could see him from my window — for over half an hour. I feared my pronouns had been too familiar, though I couldn't see how to change them, for there they were in the book. On the whole I concluded I had been a trifle abrupt, and with

renewed vigour I set to and committed a host of apologetic phrases such as: "Ik bid U verschoon mij. Duizendmaal vergiffenis. Het heeft niets te be-
duiden." A pretty little triplet caught my ear and I took rather a fancy to it: "Het geeft niets — het hindert niet — het komt er niet op aan."

It was a little puzzling to disentangle some of the courteous introductions from the sentences in which they stood; and occasionally I committed to memory somewhat more than I needed. This was the case with a sentence that greatly took my fancy. It was an apology to an imaginary gentleman in a tram-car for having trodden on his foot. It seemed odd to provide yourself so soon for such contingency; but of course the book knew best. Well, from constantly seeing the two parts of this sentence together I got into the way mechanically of associating the one phrase with the other. Thus when repeating that engaging expression "Duizendmaal vergiffenis", I was accustomed to follow it up by, "dat ik op Uw teen heb getrapt," either in my own mind or audibly, for the sake of practice. From the first this polite sentence was a great favourite of mine, and I was soon able to repeat it with the utmost fluency and ease. So well did

I know it, indeed, after two day's practice that I was tempted to seek occasion for its use, and in getting into the tram-car. I was half disposed to brush, accidentally, against any object in the way for the sake of working off my courteous apology. But that sort of thing has unexpected consequences; and I came to the conclusion that it is more philosophic to learn too little than to learn too much. *Ne quid nimis*, you know."

"Oh, leave metaphysics to me," said the Philosopher, "and go on with your story. You wanted to buy pens? Did you get them?"

"Not at first," answered O' Neill shamefacedly "but I'll tell you about it".

CHAPTER IV.

THE PURCHASE OF THE PENS.

"And what", said I, "might be the particular difficulty of saying *pens* in Dutch? You had a dictionary?"

"Dictionary indeed!" retorted O'Neill with some heat. "Commend me to a dictionary for leading you astray."

There was a penholder in the room, so what I needed was only nibs. Having already with much pain made my selection among the *have you's*, I now looked up *nib* in the dictionary. Nib was represented by five words, three of which seemed likely enough to be right, i. e. *neb*, *punt*, and *snavel*. Accordingly I wrote these down and worked out their plurals and diminutives? The doubtful ones I kept in reserve. Why did I fancy diminutives?

Oh, the grammar put me on the way of finding them, and I got quite partial to their use. It is such a comfort, you know, they are all neuter. You can put *het* in front of one, and then it's safe for nominative or accusative, wherever it drops in the sentence.

Thus armed for the fray, and confiding in my grammar and dictionary, I sallied forth to buy those nibs.

There was no use in going to a large shop, for experience had taught me I should at once be accosted there in English; so I wandered about till I discovered a kind of small general warehouse in an obscure street. Making sure, by a careful inspection from without, that pens were among the commodities sold in this place, I muttered a polite phrase or two below my breath, cleared my throat, and entered boldly. There was a big good-natured man reading behind the counter. No one else was in the shop. The circumstances simply couldn't be more propitious for beginning the difficult art of Dutch conversation.

"Mynheer!" said the big man, putting down the newspaper and looking at me amiably over his spectacles.

"Mynheer!" I replied, "Ik wensch U goeden morgen."

In the momentary pause that I was obliged to make, to get my polite phrase properly by the end, he rose up and said in an encouraging, friendly manner, "Wat wou Mynheer?"

"Mynheer", I returned, confident in the correctness of phrase number two, "Mag ik U beleefd verzoeken mij mede te deelen, verkoopt jullie nebben — of nebs?"

He eyed me steadily for half a minute and then exclaimed:

"Blief?"

I said "Blief" too.

But I had to go over it again. He shook his head: "Nebbs — Nebbs? Wat bedoelt Mynheer?"

"Heeft UE nebs, — of nebben?" I said — "of nebbetjes?"

The last variations were of my own invention, thrown out as suggestions merely in order to make sure of catching the correct plural. The Grammar — Boyton, you know — had been strong on diminutives; hence I thought "nebbetjes" might make things clear. Apparently it did, for a deep voice at my elbow said, "Voor paling", and I

turned round to see a red-faced sailor with rings in his ears, nodding and smiling. "Ja, ja, ik weet het wel," he said to the shopman; "Mynheer gaat visschen," adding confidentially for my benefit, "Engelsman always feesh."

Before I had made out what this friendly mariner wanted to be at, the shopman had produced a tiny fishing-rod and tackle, which he planted down before me with an air of triumph, "Als 't U blieft, Mynheer!"

"Neen — Ik bid U" — I explained, grasping for my manuscript. A glance at the document told me that the next word for nib was *punt*, plural probably "*punten*", pronunciation doubtful.

"Mynheer", I said, "zou U zoo goed willen wezen my te zeggen verkoopt UE poenten?"

"Wat zegt U, Mynheer?"

I explained "Zou U zoo goed willen zijn mij beleeft te zeggen en te verwittigen, verkoopt UEdele poenten of poentekens?"

I put in the "UEdele" once, you see, to propitiate the shopman, who was growing flurried, as the shop was beginning now to fill with customers. He didn't seem, however, more than half pleased at being called "UEdele; so I determined to give him

another pronoun next time — there was plenty of choice without touching on the despised “jy.”

“Ik bid U verschoon my! Mag ik beleefd verzoeken, verkoopt gy (lieden) spitsen?” When I came to the brackets of the (lieden) I expressed them vaguely by a graceful sweep of both hands.

No; he shrugged his shoulders in good-natured perplexity; he didn't understand; and indeed my rendering of the (lieden) may have confused him.

Then in dumb show I wrote with an imaginary pen on an imaginary piece of paper, saying very distinctly, “poent!” “spits!” “poent!” A light seemed suddenly to dawn upon him; he went to a drawer and brought out crayons and pencils, and reached me a stumper, — one of those soft pointed things for rubbing in mountains and clouds, on a pencil sketch. It was such a surprise after the fishing rod that I involuntarily exclaimed, “Hallo! a stumper!” Well, as that harmless English term seemed to ruffle him somewhat, I hurried to my next word. This word by the way I had written twice, having misspelled it the first time. Now as I stooped down to make it out, my nautical friend, whose interest in me had never flagged, read it before me: “Swavel! mynheer wou swavel.”

"Hoeveel?" said the shopman impatiently.

"Voor dit," I replied, putting down a five-penny piece.

He mumbled something about swavel to a message-boy, who forthwith left the shop; and I sat down to wait. It was a vast relief to cease speaking Dutch for a few minutes; and yet I felt uneasily conscious that there was a mistake somewhere. The shop was filled with pens, so that if I was really buying pens now — as I hoped I was — there was no need for the message-boy to go elsewhere.

On calmly examining my notes I detected the error. The sailor had read the word in the first rough draft instead of the corrected copy. I started up hurriedly and went to the counter through the crowd.

"Duizendmaal vergiffenis!" I said. "Verschoon my. Ik veroorzaak U veel moeite."

"Ja mynheer," he replied patiently.

"Niet zwavel hier," I said, pointing to my paper. 'I have drawn my pencil through it,' I wanted to say, but of course couldn't. Then a happy thought struck me. Say I have a line through it — streepje is the grammar word for a little line.

"Mijnheer," I explained, "niet zwavel hier ;

zwavel niet. Ik heb een streepje door het." Well, would you believe me, that was the most successful remark I had made as yet? I expected that he would be irritated by my mistake and apology. No such thing. He received my statement with unbounded delight. "Ja, ja," he said, "dat geloof ik ook; dat geloof ik ook."

"Wel zeker," I continued pleasantly, glad to see him take it in such good part. "Een streepje door."

With that they all turned to one another and smiled and nodded to me quite merrily, as if I had said something clever. It shows what a literary people the Dutch are, that they are pleased beyond measure when a foreigner in conversation refers to any small technicality out of the grammar. Indeed so encouraged was I by all this enthusiasm that I boldly made use of my remaining words.

"Mynheer! wilt u mij toestaan U te vragen verkoopt gy snavels?"

"Snavels," I repeated as he stared, — "of snaveltjes".

He gasped a moment, as if taken utterly by surprise; then ran behind the counter into a little dark room, where I could hear him make a succession of curious muffled sounds. The noise subsided,

and he seemed to tell the story to somebody. A white face peered out from behind the lace curtains — and the chuckling was renewed. Now this was all very puzzling — but it was quite clear that ‘snavel’ was not the usual term for ‘pen’.

Here the little errand-boy entered with a package which he thrust into my hand.

Sulphur!

“Heelemaal neen,” I said.

I was vainly endeavouring to get him to take it back, when the shopman reappeared from his dark den as grave as a judge, and I turned to him.

There was one word left. It might be right, though I had doubted it from the first; but I would try. It was a long word, too, and from the root of the first part, it promised to have something to do with fowls. Thus I conjectured that its meaning might be ‘quill pen’; but my confidence in the dictionary was by this time much shaken.

“Wilt gij my toestaan”, I said, “U te vragen?”
“Ja, mijnheer!” he replied expectantly.

Then I got a little confused, and no wonder. “Durf ik zoo beleefd te kunnen zijn! . . . om mij mede te deelen en . . . mij te verwittigen?” I lost myself again. It’s easy to begin a Dutch conversation

but hard to get out of it with honour. Like a drowning man clutching at a straw I grasped at something: "Verkoopt jullie hoenderhokken . . . of hoenderhokkjes?"

He said nothing — did not even look at me — but moved his hands helplessly, as if subduing some strong emotion. I did not press this word on him, as I scarcely ever use quill pens; and it was as likely as not that the dictionary had failed me again.

I set him at his ease by a courteous phrase or two. "Het geeft niets — het hindert niet — het komt er niet op aan." Then refraining from further speech, I pointed out some nibs with my umbrella, and, having secured a box of excellent J pens, made good my retreat under cover of a friendly phrase or two: "Mijnheer! het spijt mij zeer; maar ik moet afscheid nemen. Vaarwel."

It had been rather a strain, and I was glad to get out again into the open air. On the way home I could think it all over calmly, and at leisure I deduced that most useful principle *never to use more than one word out of the dictionary for one word of English.*

CHAPTER V.

LOCAL COLOUR.

After these efforts I judged it wise to take a day or two's rest from the actual practice of Dutch conversation till my nerves had recovered their tone, and until I had mastered more of the grammar and the idiom. I was the more concerned to do so as Enderby, to whom I had related my purchase of the pens, told me that my language on that occasion had been much too stiff and formal. For the purpose then of acquiring an everyday vocabulary I listened attentively to the talk in the streets and tram-cars. Most of it was unintelligible to me, but I caught up some vigorous and happy phrases here and there. These I soon learned to pronounce in a kind of way, but it was difficult to

get at their exact meaning, for many popular idioms did not appear in my dictionary at all.

There was a vocable that occasioned me some perplexity — indeed a haze envelopes it still. It sounded like *Eris*, but had nothing to do with the Goddess of Strife. It doesn't seem to have any particular signification, and you can introduce it anywhere to give a finish to your style. Some people were fond of *evetjes*, a word of the same class, on which none of my books shed the least light. Though my authorities were likewise silent about, *Toe! toe dan*, I perceived that this was the proper expression for courteous appeal, and as such I have always used it, with confidence and success.

Two curious imperative moods, which were popular at the street corners, I did find in my grammar. They belong to that provoking category of words that, as you touch them carelessly, break up into smaller verbs and prepositions. I used to compare them mentally to those lizards that drop their tails when you handle them roughly. Only instead of tails these *werkwoorden* drop their *voorzetsels*, which turn up again unexpectedly in distant parts of the sentence. One of these "lizards" was *schei uit*, which means indifferently, 'stop talking now', 'analyse it'

and 'go away'. It was pleasant to hear so scientific a term as *schei er uit* or *schiet nouw op* (shoot up now, aim high) used so often. I soon became quite dexterous in employing them myself. On the whole I got little help from my dictionary in tracing out the idioms of everyday life. Two interrogative particles, for example, without which the lower classes, when excited, could hardly ask a question, were quite ignored both by Boyton and the *Woordenboek*. The were *Zaliku* and *Woujeme*. I was left to conjecture the force of these particles — that they were forcible I could see — might remotely resemble that of the familiar *num* or *nonne* of Latin.

Occasionally animated interlocutors became suddenly oracular: their flow of language stopped and they uttered some one solitary syllable such as *Gunst!* or *heus!* or *mis!* or *raak!* These single shots were often most effective, but I never could imitate them successfully. *Ach!* was safe mostly for "I'm sorry"; *Och!* for "I don't care"; and I discovered a treasure in *Hé!* That is a contraction for "Do you really mean it?" On the other hand *Hè!* I found was "Shocking!" "How very dreadful!" When I used these little words I seemed never quite to hit the bull's eye, however. Invariably I

said either more or less than I intended. But I made very good play with pretty triplets like *'t zal wel*, and *schei er uit*, and with expressions of approval: *da's leuk*, *aardig hoor*, *och kom*. It gives a vivid local colour to your conversation if you drop in now and again a homely fresh idiom caught from the lips of the people. That prevents one's vocabulary becoming too bookish. You can give quite a realistic flavour to your remarks by interjecting occasionally *waarempeltjes* or *Wel van mijn leven!* Among the encouraging ejaculations of every day I soon concluded that none was more likely to prove useful than "*Zanik nou niet*", a popular favourite which one may render roughly by "Pray, don't mention it", "Don't trouble about it". This idiom has been simply invaluable.

Anomalies of pronunciation were not numerous, but they existed. *Nouw*, a common word, must be spelt *nu*; and the advice *duwen*, which was printed up on the inner door of the Post-Office, was pronounced *douwe*. Most enigmatical perhaps was the contrast between the barber's notice on the window of his establishment, and what he said to you when you entered. Outside it was *haarsnijden* and never anything else. That

is the printed form; inside, however, you must pronounce it *haarkenippen*.

Still these are trifles compared with the real puzzles. I witnessed a street dispute one evening. It was about herring, I think, but I really couldn't follow the one thousandth part of the vigorous debate. Picturesque idioms were bandied to and fro; happily no harm was done. One could not help noticing that the Grammar-book was right. *Jij* and *jou* were freely employed, and the disputants did not once address each other as *U* or *UEdele*. On that occasion there was another epithet or pronoun or interjection, which none of my previous studies had at all prepared me for. Turning it up in the dictionary as well as I could, I learnt that it might be translated by 'lightning', and that it was an ordinary noun. Next day I enquired of Enderby if the word for lightning could ever be employed as an interrogative particle or a pronoun. He was horrified and said "Please don't be vulgar".

"All right," I replied, "I don't intend to be, but what about that personal pronoun?"

"Hush!" he said. "Stop; it's not a pronoun."

"Well whatever it is," I told him, "noun or pro-

noun, if you had heard it used as I did, you would admit that it was very *personal*."

"Don't be frivolous," he retorted solemnly, "and let me give you a piece of advice. As long as you are in Holland never let anyone hear you utter that word. Say *onweer* or *weerlicht*. The other word is not decent, it is almost wicked."

"There now; don't be surly", I reasoned, "the thing is in the dictionary."

"Never mind. That's for science or for poetry. Then it's all right. But *you* had better have nothing to do with it. Try and forget it."

I did try. But I didn't succeed.

For the more trouble you take to forget a thing, the better you remember it. At least that's my experience, and if I strain every nerve to get a word out of my head, it simply never goes! So if there be a Dutch noun that I recall accurately and without effort, it is just the scientific and poetical term for 'lightning'.

CHAPTER VI.

A WASH-LIST IN DUTCH.

It was a day or two after the purchase of the pens and I was beginning to feel my zeal for Dutch returning, when the landlady entered the sitting-room and fired my enthusiasm. She had a collar and a pocket-handkerchief in her hand; she waved them in the air and said "Voor de waschvrouw."

I caught the idea at once, banished the landlady, and sat down to make out a wash-list with the help of the dictionary and by the light of nature.

In bold characters I headed my document 'Lijst voor de Waschvrouw'; and turned up the word 'collar'. The usual thing, of course, met my gaze — a bewildering supply of equivalents — boordje, rollade, kraag, halsband, halssieraad. Now for the

crucial question — on what principle am I to make my selection? For I was quite determined to stick by the principle I had learnt in the pen-shop, and use only one Dutch word for one word in English. But which one? The dictionary had a second part to it, Dutch into English. So I felt sure in my innocence that I could hunt down anything and get its exact signification.

I tried 'boordje'.

It was a bad omen that 'boordje' didn't figure in the Dutch-English part at all. Naturally a man reasons that if boordje really means a common thing like collar — an article of attire in daily use — it would surely be given a place in a Dutch-English lexicon. It wasn't there; and to confirm me in my determination to reject 'boordje', my eye caught 'boord'. 'Boord' was of fairly catholic application; for it included things as dissimilar as border, rim, shelf, seam, bank and hem. To make a diminutive of this, — 'little border', 'little rim', 'little bank', — wouldn't bring one measurably nearer 'collar'. *Boordje* therefore was rejected absolutely. So far good.

Rollade was more promising. It suggested somehow a turn-down collar, and sounded courtly. But

there was against it the strong objection that it didn't appear in the Dutch-English lexicon. *Rollade* therefore was set aside provisionally.

Kraag again offered well, but on inspection proved far too vague, for it included the ideas of cape, neck, nape and hood. That wouldn't do. It was far too uncertain. Therefore 'Kraag' was marked as 'doubtful.'

Diligence however is its own reward, and I found a prize in the next word. *Halsband* answered every reasonable expectation. It stood every test I could apply to it.

The Dutch-English lexicon said it was 'collar', and nothing more.

Etymology confirmed the dictionary: *hals*, the neck; *band*, a band — a band for the neck — what could be clearer? If that wasn't collar, nothing was.

So I wrote down with much confidence, as my first item, 6 *halsbanden*. I felt that this was an excellent beginning and that Dutch was not such a difficult language after all. *Gunst!* I said to myself; for I felt so elated at my success, that in a way I was almost thinking in Dutch. *Gunst, uitstekend!* now for the next article.

That was *cuff*. Cuff said the dictionary was slag,

manchet, oorveeg and handboei. Which would I take? I examined *slag*, and learnt it was the proper term for battle, fight, or opportunity.

This gave me much food for thought. I turned the matter over in every possible way, yet to no purpose. It was impossible to detect any necessary connection between a 'battle' or an 'opportunity', and 'a pair of cuffs'; so I dropped 'slag' without regret.

'*Oorveeg*' at first looked more attractive.

Its derivation, however, showed that it was something that 'skimmed along' the ear, or 'touched it lightly'!

Now it was conceivable that the sleeves or cuffs of ancient times had proved inconvenient; but that they had ever been so large as to flap about one's ears, I positively refused to believe.

It was quite a comfort to discover, as I did somewhat by accident, that 'oorveeg' meant a 'box on the ear.' Thus I could reject it without scruple — which I did.

Manchet was so obviously French that I never looked at it twice. My grammar was most stringent in banishing all foreign words. Especially avoid French terms, it insisted. That was an easy rule. Geen Fransch woordje bij! So I avoided manchet.

I had now only one word left, which of course must be right. *Handboei*, moreover, defined its own functions with welcome precision. It obviously meant something to *fit* closely round the *hand*; and with a sense of having achieved an intellectual victory, I set down on my list below the 'halsbanden', '4 paar handboeien'.

After this discipline in the art of 'rejections and exclusions' it seemed child's play to fix on the proper rendering for *sock*.

Sok — blyspel — vilten binnenzool — ploegschaar, — that was what the front part of the dictionary gave me to work upon. 'Blyspel' and 'ploegschaar' I dropped overboard without qualm, for I found they meant 'comedy' and 'ploughshare'; and when it came to choosing between sok and vilten binnenzool, I gave the first the preference, as my book shed no light whatever on vilten binnenzool.

I regretted this rather, as there was a fine air of dignity about the latter.

But I put down '4 paar sokken,' with a note of interrogation, and added 'vilten binnenzolen' in brackets — to make all clear.

There were seven 'handkerchiefs' to be translated

into Dutch; and for 'handkerchief' the little fat Dictionary became more than usually oracular.

Opposite the English word it had two Dutch words without a comma between, so that I felt morally certain it was a case of *vilt en binnenzool* again — a sort of euphonious compound which you must take in its entirety or not at all.

This compound word was 'Zie beneden'.

I soon detected that the primitive meaning of this curious name was 'look below'. At first indeed it struck me that it might refer to a footnote; but there was no footnote in the Dictionary, good or bad, from cover to cover, except B* on page 91, so I soon abandoned this idea as fanciful.

It was certainly hard to trace any connection between the advice (imperative mood, if you please) 'see below!' and what we usually understand by a 'handkerchief'.

The mystery seemed to clear a little when I remembered that a 'handkerchief' was a 'kerchief' for the hand; and that in the Tudor age 'kerchiefs' used to be worn round the neck. In fine old historical portraits that I had seen of Queen Elizabeth and Queen Mary, their Majesties were always represented with elaborate cambric things about their

shoulders. It was quite a feature of the period. Thus 'zie beneden' was no doubt the original word corresponding to 'kerchief'; and it would take its name from the fact that when the wearer in ancient times glanced down, he could easily see it on his chest. He would call it a 'look below' quite naturally. Then the name would remain unaltered, while the article would become first a kerchief for the hand, then finally a pocket-handkerchief.

As there were plenty of analogies in English for that sort of word formation, I became quite sure of my ground, and at the end of my list wrote with the pride of a philologist, '*7 ziebenedens*'.

A few other word I got with comparative ease, and jotted down in their places.

The more I looked at my finished document, the better I liked it.

This is how it ran: —

Lyst voor de Waschvrouw:

6 halsbanden,

4 paar handboeien.

3 nachtgewaden.

4 paar sokken? (Vilten binnenzolen).

7 Zie benedens.

Totaal = 32 Voorwerpen.

Ik bid de waschvrouw gauw de voorwerpen terug te zenden.

Aug. 5.

J. O'Neill.

I was quite unprepared for the effect which my manuscript had on the landlady. When she came up presently for the wash-list, I said to her carelessly, as if I was in the habit of writing Dutch every day, "Voor de waschvrouw, — klaar".

She took the document in her hand and glanced at it; then suddenly sat down in my best arm-chair!

Now you must know that she is very respectful, always stands deferentially in my presence, and never dreams of taking liberties. Her conduct now was unaccountable. There she sat in the chair, rocking to and fro, her face hidden with both hands. Her agitation increased till finally she gave a kind of snort, for which she immediately apologised: "Neem me niet kwalijk, mijnheer! neem me niet kwalijk!"

Having regained a momentary composure, she dried her eyes with the corner of her apron and allowed her gaze to wander round the room. It fell upon my paper, and off she went again in a sort of suppressed shriek.

"O mijnheer! mijnheer!" she stammered convulsively. "Het is — voor — voor een hond!"

She ended with a hysterical sob as if she feared her emotions would choke her utterance.

All this naturally raised my suspicions as to the purity of my Dutch, though it seemed incredible that there could be much amiss with it. "Voor een hond" sounded like an expression of contempt, just as we dub ill-composed Latin, 'Dog-Latin', or pronounce poor food to be 'not fit for a dog.'

She surely couldn't imply that my Dutch would make a dog laugh?

It was clear now that she was highly amused at something I had written. At this I was just a little indignant, having spent all the morning hunting up equivalents in the dictionary and debating with myself about them.

To discourage her levity I answered quite coldly: "Wat is voor een hond? ik zie geen hond. Waar is hij?"

"O mijnheer", was the spasmodic reply, delivered in jerks, "halsband, — hals — band — is altijd voor — voor een hond! Ik lach me dood!"

I could not argue the point with her or convince her by reasoning that my choice must be correct.

So I just said "Hé!" and waited for her to

recover. Presently she dried her eyes again, rose from the arm-chair, and tried to get away; but once more her eye fell on the fatal manuscript — this time on *Handboeien* — and again she dropped back with a smothered yell.

Then she apologized, then cried, then laughed, then finally gathered breath to say, "*Voor een gevangene! Moet mijnheer naar de gevangenis?*"

"Ik weet het niet," I protested in perplexity; "*ik weet er niets van. Wat is gevangenis?*"

She rose, and silently picking up my little dictionary, with an unsteady hand turned over to '*gevangenis*.' She pointed to the English and I read '*prison*'. Thus the '*handboeien*' were '*handcuffs*'!

I couldn't say she was mistaken. So I merely drew my pen through this item and said "*Hè!*" letting the matter rest.

Now she laughed at everything, at *nachtgewaden*, at *voorwerpen*, at my message to the washer-woman, even at *sokken*, though since I have never been able to discover why, except that it was the only proper word on the list.

But nothing could make her understand what I meant by *Zie-benedens*.

I couldn't explain to her all about Queen

Elizabeth and Queen Mary and the parallel historical development of cognate languages; I hadn't Dutch enough for it.

Pulling a handkerchief out of my pocket, and showing it to her, I said, "Dit — dit is een zie beneden!"

But at that she only laughed the more.

Then she chuckled and tittered and coughed and said "Oh! Oh!" and held her sides and stumbled all the way down those steep stairs to the imminent danger of her life. Half way down she had stopped for breath; distinctly I could hear her panting and muttering: "Oh mens! mens! Ik kan nie meer. Ik stik!" For the rest of the day bursts of jovial laughter kept rising from the kitchen, and an air of hilarity hung about the lower storey for a whole week.

Sir, said O' Neill, that is the deplorable result of bringing reason to bear on the material the dictionary gives. For here is another general principle I have discovered about languages: *The more arguments you find in favour of any given word the more certain it is that that word is totally wrong.*

CHAPTER VII.

SOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

Next evening Jack O'Neill resumed his narrative to myself alone, on the understanding that our friends would drop in if they could.

"Where was I?" he said. "Ah, yes, I had just told you about the wash-list.

"Well; I learnt many things in the next few days, said he, — especially grammar. Rules and exceptions I committed to memory and could rattle you off *werkwoorden* and *voortzetsels*, *bijvoegelijke naamwoorden*, *verleden deelwoorden* and *onbepaalde wijzen* with vigour and promptitude.

In walking about the town and neighbourhood, too, I caught up more and more of those native idioms that give colour and fragrance to one's speech. Of course I was at a loss

own and again to explain what I heard and saw.

The notice boards, for example, of some inn such as "De Nieuwe Aanleg" remained somewhat mysterious; and on enquiry a satisfactory translation was never forthcoming. "The New Genius" was very wide of the mark, evidently. "The New Tendency" was equally obscure.

Two common English verbs I found very difficult to render exactly. These were 'drive' and 'put'.

'Put' you have to use so often that it is certainly provoking to hunt for a new verb almost every time you have a fresh order to give. 'Put it down', 'put it in the cupboard,' 'put it in the hall' — well, I managed these somehow. But when it came to having letters posted, I was a long time at sea.

I wrote a good deal; and 'put that letter in the box' was a common order I had to give. Now 'box' was easy enough, for the receptacle in the street was duly called 'Brievenbus'. But when I said, 'Plaats dien brief in de brievenbus,' the maidservant stared at me as if I was hardly human.

'Zet' and 'werp' were not much clearer, apparently. 'Gooi', I must admit, always made her perform the task with alacrity, but with an air that plainly said the matter was not very serious.

By a happy accident I became aware that all you need say for 'put' is '*doe*'; but alas! it will only help you for a few of the simplest 'puts'.

Two functionaries called about orphans one day, and I said "Put me down for five guilders". "*Doe mij beneden voor vijf gulden*". It wasn't idiomatic, but they caught the idea when they saw the coins.

Of course the long and the short *a* are notorious, and they perplexed me nearly every time I worked with them. You can't be always sure that you have hit the right one.

An important letter had to go off one evening, and I impressed on the domestic that she must be careful.

'*Voorzichtig hoor! — voorzichtig!*' I repeated, '*want dit is een gewichtige zak*'.

I might have spared myself the trouble, for she tossed it in one hand and said. "*Een zak, mijnheer, ha!*" and departed with a gaiety of manner that augured ill for the safety of my missive. All the while I imagined I had said *zaak*, — but my *a* was too short.

One night when the landlady's son — a promising youth of thirteen — brought up the supper, he appeared playful and excited. He urged me, as I understood it, to come downstairs and admire a man that was in the street. Surely it must be a fine

specimen of manly grace that could elicit this interest! Yes, the man there was 'erg mooi', he assured me.

'U moet es eve kome kijke, mijnheer.'

The request was odd, and I refused at first. As he persisted, however, I accompanied him downstairs, wondering whether there was an acrobat performing in the market-place or if a statue had been erected whilst I was at dinner.

When we came outside, there was nothing remarkable to be seen in the street. My guide, however, didn't mind that, but pointing triumphantly to the sky where the full moon was shining, he exclaimed with delight: "Daar, mijnheer, kijk nou is, nietwaar?"

It looked like boyish chaff, getting the foreigner to leave his room to gaze at the 'man in the moon', and I was dumb with indignation at his audacity. Gradually, however, the facts of the case emerged. The youth was only considerably anxious that I should not miss seeing the big Dutch moon itself, which was indeed that evening particularly fine. It was a 'mooi maan' not "man".

Yes; the long and the short α are not to be trifled with, and you'll get into no end of trouble if you ever mix them.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT FOR A WALK.

Starting one morning for a long ramble in the country I took the first stage by tram. It was very early, and as there were no other passengers, the conductor was disposed to be communicative. He was absolutely eager to talk, and he came up to me at once.

Now I have noticed that at one time it is much easier to express oneself in a foreign language than at another.

Sometimes the grammar you have mastered becomes positively oppressive, and your tongue refuses to lend itself to the task.

I cannot tell whether it may be due to barometric pressure or to some electrical condition, but on certain days I cannot — to put it mildly —

come up to my normal standard, either of perspicuity or ease.

This was one of my bad days, and I was little inclined to respond to the conductor's advances. Fate was against me, however, for I didn't know the name of the place I was bound for. Enderby had several times taken me to a pretty village some few miles from the Hague. It was the terminus of the tram-line, and I purposed to tram there first and then to start out on my country walk.

I had never troubled much about the geography of the district, and consequently was quite in the dark now as to what the village was called. This was awkward, for the talkative conductor was already at hand trying to open conversation.

He made a first essay by producing his bunch of tickets and asking me, "Hoe ver, mijnheer?"

I waved my hand and said, "Den geheelen weg." Seeing he was not satisfied with this, I amplified the remark by adding "Naar het einde."

As he was still slightly bewildered, I glanced up to the tram-car itself to ascertain, if possible, its destination. The designation of the village would surely be printed somewhere on the vehicle.

Happily I could just make out at the end of a long series of hard words the name 'Simplex'. Pointing to this with a careless flourish of my stick I said "Ja; ik ga even naar Simplex."

"Net, mijnheer," he laughed, "ha! ha!, overal reclame!"

Before he had recovered from my unconscious wit, I perceived the error into which I had fallen. Simplex was merely a cycle-advertisement.

Then I laughed as heartily as he, saying "Gunst ja; overal" — which emboldened him to be still more familiar.

He fancied that I was a perfect master of Dutch, and could even joke in it. He talked most volubly; and, — my reputation as a linguist being now at stake, — whenever he made a slight pause I was obliged to say something to show I understood.

I didn't understand. But I started him off always when he was inclined to stop, and I kept him going by a careful use of 'ja' and 'neen'. If he appeared to expect agreement, I threw in a hearty 'natuurlijk', 'ja zeker', or 'wel van mijn leven.' At other points, and for variety's sake, I interjected indignant negatives: 'Wel nee!' 'schei er uit!' 'Hoe heb ik het met je?' — and now and then even

'och kom!' with the peculiar shake of the head that accompanies this phrase.

The plan was brilliantly successful. True, he stopped sometimes and took a long queer look at me ; but he was one of those garrulous people that require little encouragement, and the flood of his reminiscences always poured forth again as freely as ever.

We got along famously together — though I didn't know one word he said — till we came opposite a tall church. Nodding patronisingly towards this building he said, "Pracht van een Kerk", adding something about a 'hooge toren'.

Here I felt on solid ground, — I understood him thoroughly. My natural wish to take an intelligent part in the conversation would be gratified if only I could say something about that edifice; and, one of the fresh idioms that I had recently acquired occurring to me, I promptly gave it to him by way of reply: "Ja, prachtig; het is kolossaal mooi."

This choice idiom I had got just the day before from a policeman. We had been standing in front of a florist's window — the policeman and I — admiring the tiny vases of lilies of the valley that were displayed there, when I heard him murmur half to himself and half to me "kolossaal mooi!" The

combination so captivated my fancy that I added it without delay to my working stock.

The tram-conductor emphatically agreed with my criticism. "Kolossaal!" he repeated.

Thus encouraged I attempted to contribute something further to the conversation, and catching sight of a lofty lightning-conductor, on the church-steeple, I tried to draw his attention to it by an easy grammatical remark.

The word 'lightning-conductor' did not seem to present difficulties.

'Lightning' of course I remembered, though I ought to have forgotten it long ago. No doubt it was to be approached with caution; but as this was a matter of pure science I felt tolerably safe. As for 'conductor', there could be little doubt as to the way to render that, for 'conducteur' was stamped on the tram-man's buttons, and had been staring me in the face for the last half-hour. Those buttons were as good as a dictionary.

Putting together then the component parts of 'lightning-conductor,' I hazarded a bold guess, and waving my hand towards the steeple I said cordially, "Ja, de toren is mooi — kolossaal mooi. Gunst; ja. — Zoo is ook die bliksem-conducteur! Vind U niet?"

Well, he stopped as if I had struck him ; his face got fiery red, and he walked away without a word !

What had I done ? There was no denying something had gone wrong. Evidently the man was choking with rage, and he didn't so much as glance at me for the rest of the journey.

That same afternoon I reported the affair to Enderby, who grew quite gruff and crusty before I had finished the narration.

"Didn't I warn you", he grumbled, "against those horrid expressions that you seem so fond of ? You must really take care, O'Neill, — or I won't speak to you as long as you stay in Holland."

It was useless to assure him that I had referred to the 'lightning-conductor' merely in its permissible and scientific sense. He would listen to no explanations. "You simply can't imagine how shocking all that talk of yours sounds, or you wouldn't attempt to justify your vulgarity."

"Begging your lordship's pardon", I retorted ironically, "for all my unseemly conduct, may I enquire humbly what the dignified term is ? *Onweers-conducteur*, perhaps ? Or *weerlichtsconducteur* ?

"Nonsense !" he almost shouted. "The thing's quite easy — "*bliksemafleider*."

"Aha," I could not help retorting, "you see after all you are in the wrong. You warned me against *lightning* — quite needlessly, you now admit — but you never said a syllable about that really dangerous word *conductor*."

But to return to my trip that lovely morning. The tram duly reached 'Simplex', and the conductor was unfeignedly relieved to see me alight.

It was perfect weather, and my annoyances were soon forgotten. There was such a shimmer and haze and play of light over the wide landscape as I have seen only in Holland.

I was delighted. Such a scene is an inspiration. It makes one wish to be a painter or a poet or something. Subtle and delicate shades varied the long stretches of green meadow; clumps of trees, church towers, tiny red-roofed villages dotted the landscape; while here and there as far as the eye could reach, wide canals — the very pictures of tranquillity — reflected the great white clouds sailing overhead.

"Splendid, splendid!" I exclaimed to myself. And charming indeed did my ramble prove to be.

But the day was hot, and I was glad at last about eleven o'clock to come to a good-sized tea-garden

over the entrance to which stood in conspicuous letters, "*Uitspanning.*" Here was cool shade under broad trees; and here were innumerable little tables at which a number of people were seated, laughing and chattering and lunching pleasantly, while little children, some of them not more than three years old, kept running about and playing games. And all these tiny tots, too, were talking Dutch, happily and unconcerned, tossing about in childish glee and with incredible ease, onbepaalde wijzen, verleden deelwoorden and voorzetsels, not to speak of het and hen and hun and je.

On entering this popular resort and looking round I was addressed by a breathless waiter laden with plates. "Waar wou mynheer zitten?"

The shade was deepest under a noble elm, where at this instant I spied an unoccupied seat close to the wooden paling that skirted the enclosure. I didn't know what 'paling' was, but I chanced it, as there was no time for the dictionary. "Naast de paling," I said, "als 't U blieft."

The impatient waiter nearly dropped his tray, but recovering himself he vanished, and I took the seat myself. Another kellner appeared, — a slow grave man in whose district was situated the attractive

nook I had been fortunate enough to secure. The day was broiling hot, as I told you, and I thought I couldn't do better than begin with a little lemon-squash.

I could have wished to study up my part a little; but as the slow dignitary was already waiting, I asked for a "limoen en een glas water." Having greeted my remark twice with "blief?" he drew himself up and enquired if I wanted 'liemonade.'

"Geen kwestie van," I said, hauling out of my pocket the little fat dictionary, that faithful companion of my wanderings. "Wacht even!" I hurriedly turned up "squash; for on the analogy of meloen I assumed that 'lemoen' was all right for lemon. The verb squash was *moezen*; the noun *moes*. This latter I chose, preferring the beverage ready-made, if possible.

"Ja, kellner" — I said, "nu weet ik het al. Breng mij limoenmoes."

He raised his eyebrows and said: "Bedoelt mijnheer soms appelmoes?"

Apple squash? That seemed rather a good idea. It sounded like cider or apple-lemonade.

"Ja, best," I said; "breng mij een glas appelmoes, maar niet te sterk."

When he was gone to draw some of this mysterious beverage, who should turn up but Enderby? He had been motoring; and was coming back from Amsterdam when some pinion had given way, and he had to stop at the Uitspanning for repairs. He came up to me and sat down saying: "Well, O'Neill, you're a long way from home; how did you get here? What are you taking this hot weather?"

"Indeed," said I, "I don't exactly know. It's apple-squash, or rather a sort of apple lemonade, — cider, I believe."

"Ah," said he with surprise, "you talked English, I suppose?"

"Not at all, — not a word. I never speak English now. It was all Dutch."

"Then I tell you, you *have* made progress with the language! For here have I been in Holland for fifteen years, and I never even heard of apple lemonade yet. To tell you the truth, I should not know how to ask for it. My boy, I congratulate you on your linguistic enterprise!"

The waiter reappeared just then, and Enderby interposed, "Mynheer heeft iets besteld, nietwaar? Wat is dat voor een drankje? Geen limonade?"

"Nee, menheer", said the waiter in a complaining

tone, "volstrekt niet, mynheer is wat vreemd, ziet u; want," and here his voice sank to a horrified whisper, "menheer eet meloen met appelmoes!"

Enderby looked at me in speechless astonishment; while the waiter murmured, perhaps as a further suggestion of guilt on my part: "We hebbe geen paling!"

Matters had got so involved that I could not explain anything to him; except to say that I had started with the intention of cooling my thirst with lemon squash.

He was inclined to be huffy once more. "There you are at it again! Look here now; do take some care about what you say. I'll get that drink for you this time; and, for any sake if you want 'kwast' again, don't say appelmoes. Indeed I strongly advise you to stick to English, or you will get into worse trouble yet."

Enderby went off in high dudgeon, and I took a long ramble under the trees. It was not long till I shook off the effects of my grammatical skirmishes and began to enjoy the day to the full.

In point of fact I made several sketches, and returning in a couple of hours had luncheon successfully. That was comparatively easy. I had merely

to say, "Koffie! — Kaas!" — and the meal was ready.

Being by this time a trifle tired, I conceived the idea of driving back to the Hague, for it seemed too far to walk. In this design I was encouraged by the presence of a considerable number of vehicles with horses, standing about.

On examining my dictionary to get the Dutch idiom for 'drive home' I discovered three curious translations for drive: 'rijden', 'drijven' (used, I was informed, of ice) and 'jagen.'

Now seeing that 'rijden', meant 'to ride', and 'jagen,' to 'hunt,' and the other word was restricted to icebergs, there really appeared to be a lack of the precise term I needed.

Obliged thus to circumscribe my meaning, I rapped on my green table and enquired, "Kelluer, kan ik een paard hebben?"

The waiter mumbled inarticulately, coughed apologetically, and vanished like a shadow.

Presently he came back with a red-faced man who seemed to be the proprietor of the Uitspanning. What I wanted to say was, "Have you a horse disengaged to drive me to the Hague!" but owing to the defective character of the Dutch vocabulary

this could not be said directly, and I was obliged to go round the point.

I went round it thus: "Mag ik beleefd vragen, Mynheer, heeft U paarden beschikbaar om my te dragen?"

This sounded diplomatic and neat, and was certainly clear; but the apoplectic proprietor looked askance.

He paused and endeavoured to transfix me with his beady eyes and read my inmost consciousness. This being impossible, he condescended to the gruff question: "Wou meneer een peerd koope?"

"Kooopen?" I replied in astonishment, "oh niet kooopen! Gunst! ashjebliedt niet."

"Raie dan?" was his brusque reply.

"Rijen, graag" I agreed; "gaarne rijden; maar — ik ben niet in staat het paard terug te zenden. En . . . en ik heb geen ruimte in mijn kamers voor een paard."

"Wat dan?" said he rudely, with a kind of a dull glare in his black eyes.

I was getting into deep water — there was no use blinking the fact — and here was this dreadful man growing more enraged and suspicious every moment. Perhaps after all I could make

something of those three doubtful dictionary words. "Kan u niet," I asked with some asperity, "kan oe niet, mijnheer, mij laten jagen naar den Haag?"

"O, hé!" exclaimed my interlocutor with a sudden access of interest and a kind of wrinkle distantly resembling a smile. "Gaat mijnheer op de jacht?"

Dear me, this is *too* bad, I thought, for I saw people watching me with a curious air of disapproval, and a good many more approaching. Really I regretted I had not walked to the Hague.

But I was in for it now, and with all the sternness I could command I explained sententiously, "Ik wensch een paard! — Om mij te trekken — in een rijtuig — naarden Haag, Ferdinand Bolstraat 66a."

My horsey friend took a step nearer, his face ominously darkening and the fierce eyes flashing fire. "Wat wou menheer eigenlijk? rijtuig huren? of pérd koope! — of raie naar de stad? — of op de jacht gaan? — of onzin praote?"

I was at my wit's end and deemed it wise to retire as soon as possible from the conversation. This I tried to do by means of that agreeable little triplet that had hitherto proved so useful to me.

"Och kom!" I said with a pleasant smile, "'t

Geeft niets; het hindert niet; het komt er niet op aan."

He was unappeased, however. So by way of friendly deprecation I added: "Laa maar! Schei er uit. — Hè! zanik nou niet!"

This did not appreciably mend matters, I assure you. — At every sentence I uttered his face grew more purple — and I was intensely relieved when at that moment one of the interested bye-standers ran up hurriedly, whip in hand, and touching his cap exclaimed: "Drive you to the Hague, Sir?" — It was a cabdriver who spoke English!

Oh! I could have embraced that man!

"Yes," said I with effusion, "Yes, at once, please! — as quick as ever you can!"

I jumped up on his vehicle and, as the vendor of peerden was still hovering unpleasantly near, I ventured on one of those despised French verbs — it was the only thing I could think of — to construct an effective phrase for my exit.

"Mynheer Uitspanning!" I said waving him adieu, "ik zal U niet verder derangeeren! — Vaarwel!"

Good-bye at last! There was a faint cheer from the score or two of spectators, but no response from my late tormentor.

What a relief to get away from the intricacies of that dreadful cross-examination!

I was flurried and worn, and did not quite recover my equanimity or feel properly cooled down till I was safely ensconced in my rooms in Ferdinand Bolstraat 66a.

CHAPTER IX.

THE QUEST OF MIJNHEER HIERNAAST.

On settling down in my rooms, I was reminded of my social duties by seeing a card from young Van der Leeuwen whom I had known at Trinity, where he had studied a year.

Van der Leeuwen had called upon me more than once and had invited me to his home. Up to this time I had not seen him since I came to the Hague.

To-day he had scribbled on a visiting card 'Leaving town soon for Arnhem.' This showed me that his friendly visit should be returned as soon as possible; so early next afternoon I journeyed across the city to see him.

I found however that the house was shut up. The blinds were down and the whole place hermetically sealed, so to speak.

On the door there was a singular notice, freshly pasted, which at once arrested my attention and which I copied into my notebook.

"Afwezig.

Brieven en boodschappen

te bezorgen bij

Mijnheer Hiernaast."

Unhappily I had left my faithful companion, the dictionary, at home. I was thus obliged to fall back upon my stock of Dutch learning and guess what I did not know.

'Boodschappen' and 'bezorgen' were new words to me, but I seemed to gather the general sense of the placard. If anybody wanted to see my friend van der Leeuwen, or communicate with him, he appeared to be invited to do so through the medium of a gentleman called "Hiernaast." The curious thing was — no address was given to indicate whereabouts Mr. Hiernaast lived.

Now this was very puzzling; for just that morning I had been shown how particular you must be in Holland about addresses. As I had not given word to the authorities when I moved from the hotel to my lodgings, I had been summoned to the "Bevolkings-registerbureau," and had to display my "Geboorteacte."

Innumerable details had been asked of me about my name and initials and about my parents' names and initials, — some of which I could not satisfactorily write out.

The functionaries at the office, too, had appeared unnecessarily amused when I told them that I lodged in Ferdinand Bolstraat above a tinsmith's. On thinking it over afterwards I admit that perhaps I had mixed the word tinsmith with lightning conductor. I was naturally anxious to avoid the latter scientific term as much as possible; and my over anxiety probably defeated itself.

At all events I was told at the Bureau that it was quite a serious offence — a sort of mild treason — to move from my hotel to lodgings without giving full information about the whole matter to the civic dignitaries.

Now, as everybody was so particular about addresses, I knew that van der Leeuwen had more respect for the laws of his country than to be guilty of intentional carelessness; and I was sure he would not try to defy the state by pasting upon his door anything of the nature of mockery. The notice *did* look like this: "Out of town. If you want to see me, go to Jericho;" but my friend would hardly have meant *that*.

I concluded therefore that Mr. Hiernaast's address was known to everybody that read the notice, and that Mr. Hiernaast was some prominent person like the Burgomaster or the Town-clerk.

Perhaps he would be an official who kindly looked after people's letters when they were out of town. If so, a policeman would know all about him. There was one passing at the moment, so I determined to accost him and get what information I could.

Now Enderby and others had instructed me about policemen. You must never say "Mijnheer" to a policeman; he doesn't like it, for he thinks you are making game of him. That's where I had made the mistake before, in the Hague wood. I learnt that his proper title is '*politieagent*' or '*agent*'; the newspapers call him '*openbare macht*'. If he comes from Amsterdam he will answer readily to *klabak* or *smeeris*, though he may prefer a more dignified title. He is known to the mob as a '*diender*', but this is rather vulgar.

Naturally I wished to avoid the vulgar word and use a respectful term; so stopping him I said, "Openbare Macht, verschoon mij, — zult gij mij toestaan om U beleefd te verzoeken, — waar woont mijnheer Hiernaast?"

I guessed what he would do, and he did it. He stared at me for about half a minute and then said, "Wah blief!"

"Oh," I responded, "duizendmaal vergiffenis, dat ik op" And then I stopped *just in time*, for it was on my tongue to finish the polite sentence as I had repeated it so often from the conversation book — "dat ik op Uwen teen getrapt heb."

It was well I didn't, for it didn't fit in at all accurately with the situation. So I said, "Kijk nou is!"

"Mag ik zoo vrij zijn, Klabak?" I murmured courteously, showing him my copy of the placard on the door, "Mijnheer Hiernaast — ziet u — *waar woont hij?*"

Well, he couldn't have been more astonished if had reached him a lighted bombshell.

Instead of meeting me with that ready sympathy I had been reckoning upon, he was quite stiff. I however persisted courteously with my question, "Ja, Openbare! wat zegt U, Smeeris? Woont mijnheer Hiernaast in deze straat?"

Well, he wasn't a bit polite; or if he was, he must have been singularly deficient in charm of manner, for he stared quite insolently at me and grumbled, "Woujeme voor de gek hou?"

Woujeme, gekhoue? Didn't I know some of those words?

On considering this utterance of his I seemed to recognise "*woujeme*" as an old friend. Wasn't that the introductory particle that was not in the dictionary and which resembled the Latin 'nonne'? Then 'gek' was remarkably like 'hek', which I knew to be 'gate'.

The landlady had always been talking about the 'hek' being open, — a state of affairs which she strongly objected to, because dogs were in the habit of strolling in and looking rudely at her through the kitchen window.

Now I knew that it would be the easiest thing in life for 'gek' to be mistaken for 'hek'.

London policemen often drop h's in one place and put them in at another. Why shouldn't a Hague policeman do something similar? You could hardly expect a policeman to speak the language with absolute accuracy.

So 'gek houwe' would probably be a common provincialism for 'hek houden'. And I could easily guess, on the analogy of 'stalhouwer', what 'hekhouwer' would mean. It would be, no doubt, a 'man that made and sold gates'. *Vóór den gek-*

nouwe(r)' would then be, as nearly as possible, the idiom for 'in front of the gate factory.'

There was no gate factory in sight, so I continued pleasantly making further enquiries of the policeman: "Voor den gekhouwer? — ja zeker! asjeblieft! Maar — zoudt gy zoo goed willen zijn — mij mede te deelen, — waar *woont* die gekhouder? Woont hij *in deze straat*? De gekkefabriek — waar is dat?"

I really pitied him, he looked so overwhelmed. Then he did something wonderful that stayed all further parley. He turned his head away, spread out both white-gloved hands, raised his shoulders slowly till they were well up over his ears, then slowly let them down again to their normal and natural position, — and all this without glancing at me.

It was an awe-inspiring spectacle, — apparently some kind of military drill to repel idle questions. I could only utter "'t Geeft niets — 't hindert niet — het komt er niet op aan! Doe geen moeite, Smeeris!" But he turned upon his heel and walked away without even saying 'Vaarwel'!

Alas, I had failed again! I had displeased the Openbare Macht and had not got a hint as to the address of the official receiver of letters.

All this was more than usually mysterious, so I tried to extract some information from the landlady that evening.

"Waar woont Mijnheer Hiernaast?" I said to her casually after dinner.

"Hiernáást, mijnheer," she replied with strong emphasis on the *naast*.

"Oh I don't mind putting the accent on the final," I murmured to myself. "Goed. Best. — Dan, waar *woont* Mijnheer Hiernáást?"

"Hiernáást," she repeated, pointing through the wall!

Had the good woman lost her senses? Or was she trying to make fun of me? In either case I did not quite care to prolong the conversation. "Lamaar", I interjected, "het heeft niets te beduiden — schei er uit, — zanik nou niet". And I must say that effectually stopped her.

The mystery was solved that same evening by Enderby, who dropped in about half past ten.

We talked over a number of things and, as Enderby was quite himself again after our little tiff at the 'Uitspanning', I just said, "Do you happen to know of the *Hiernaasts* in the Hague?"

"People called Hiernaast", I explained, as he

seemed not to catch my meaning. "They appear to be rather well-known. The father I think is a Government Official — a member of the Tweede-Kamer, I imagine, or something of that sort. I'm told he lives opposite a large gate-factory. The queer thing about the family is that, if you ask about them, everybody gives you a silly answer.

"Is he not in society, or what? Is his name like the word for lightning? May I not refer to him?"

"O'Neill", exclaimed Enderby, rising suddenly off his seat, "you are surely not quite well!"

"What is it?" he said, "were you out long in the sun? That *appelmoes* must have gone to your head! Tell me all that happened to you."

I told him the whole day's adventures; and then I learnt that Mijnheer Hiernaast is — not necessarily an Official of the Government or a member of the Tweede Kamer; indeed that he is no particular person at all; but — *just the gentleman who lives next door to you, wherever you happen to be.*

Well; that's easy enough, when you know it. But when you don't, what are you to do?

CHAPTER X.

THE PARCEL POST.

You will remember that the day I was at Simplex I took some sketches. Well, I bundled these up along with some really exquisite water-colours that I purchased at an art-shop, and I sent them to Ireland.

Yes, I bought these pictures without pain. The vendor of these objects of art spoke perfect English; it was a delight to hear him. So pleased was I with my purchases, that I hastened home, there and then, and adding my own artistic treasures, made a little square package of it all for my aunt Rebecca in Connemara, Killery Bay, — a place renowned for its beautiful sunsets and splendid salmon.

My aunt is artistic — she herself used to draw

when she was young — and I knew that nothing would please her better, as a present from Holland, than a number of carefully chosen water-colours.

Glowing with affectionate enthusiasm at the prospect of giving my aunt so agreeable a surprise, I made my way to the post-office and tried to send off my package.

An obliging official addressed me in English.

"Oh, then", he said glancing at the address and weighing my bundle in his hand, "this will cost you about six guilders if it goes as a letter, but, if it is a book it will cost you two guilders and a half. But as it appears to be neither a book nor a letter, I should advise you to send it by 'pakket-post'; the cost will be under a guilder. Please fill in these papers." And he reached me a dark red paper and a flimsy white one both of which were dotted all over with Dutch and French hard words with spaces after them to be filled in.

I retired to a little desk and did my best, — stating that I, Jack O'Neill, aged so and so, sent one brown package of expensive water-colour pictures, some pencil-sketches and one pen-and-ink drawing, value unknown, to Miss Rebecca Fitzgerald O'Neill, (zonder beroep), Warlin Castle

Killery Bay, Ireland, on the 21st of Aug., 19—. I added some other things here and there in the columns and gave this report to the official. "Not in order," he said politely, "you must put stamps on the package, with wax."

"Stamps," he added, touching it all round, "sealed with sealing wax."

"Oh, indeed!" I said. "Sorry to give you so much trouble. Many thanks!" And I carried my bundle to a neighbouring stationer's.

The stationer was not at home, and his temporary assistant was a youth that did not know English; but I borrowed an Engelsch-Hollandsch Woorden-Boek from him and instituted a search for *wax*. After some little trouble occasioned by the words 'was' and 'honigraat', I settled down comfortably on the word 'lak'; and then the stationer's boy and I got on quite nicely together. He helped me most willingly, and made all sorts of suggestions. We secured a candle and constructed two great seals, of red wax, as if was for the Lord Chancellor; and I returned to the Post-Office triumphant.

There was a new 'ambtenaar' on duty, the English-speaking one having apparently gone to luncheon.

"Mag ik beleefd verzoeken?" I said; "Zeker in orde?"

"Nee mijnheer", he replied "volstrekt niet in orde! Er moeten vijf zegels op zijn — vijf."

The bundle seemed safe enough to go half round the world! But he knew the rules; and I submitted accordingly, went back to the stationer and put five more seals on the packet, thus making the number seven in all.

On presenting my carefully prepared 'pakje' in the post-office I felt confident enough that it was right. "Nu, mijnheer, het is zeker klaar?"

The functionary was also disposed to think that all was as it ought to be and seemed at first to be satisfied.

He nodded approval; and gave me a friendly official smile; but suddenly — as he was laying the curious object aside — his eye caught the seal I had used, and his face fell. The seal was a very simple affair, having been impressed from the back of a guilder — a beautiful new specimen that I was reserving for show when I should return to Trinity.

"Nee, mijnheer", he said sharply. "Heelemaal niet goed! Het moet een werkelijk zegel zijn —

met letters — Uw naam!" And he drew imaginary initials on the blotting-paper with his thumb.

"Neen maar! — Mijnheer!" I exclaimed.

Words failed to come to my relief. I could think of nothing to say but "*Gunst!*" and in the circumstances this sounded too like a curse to venture upon. Presently however I recalled something under cover of which I could retire: "Het spijt mij erg — ik ben verbaasd — dank u vriendlijk."

I went away sincerely regretting that I had begun this business at all. Fortunately when I hunted up the stationer once more, the man himself was at home; and after infinite rummaging in remote drawers he got me a seal with the letters N. J., — which was a trifle like Jack O'Neill, if you read it backwards.

As that was the nearest approach I could get to my initials, and as no time was to be lost, we melted down another stick of red sealing-wax, and stamped the package over with seven gigantic seals, N. J.

I put on *seven*, though the official only demanded five, for I had an undefined fear that something would be wrong again. Meantime the 'get up' of the parcel was growing more impressive and un-

usual. The effect of the big letters of the seal was specially fine, the red bundle now looking as if it were bound for New Jersey.

Then in fear and trembling I made for the post-office again.

My tormentor appeared to be appeased. Ah yes, at last the letters were all right.

"Uitstekend, mijnheer," he said. And he quite beamed upon me.

"Nu de formulieren, asjeblieft."

Oh, the papers, of course! I had quite forgotten about them by this time. Fortunately I hadn't lost them; so I handed him both documents. He took them up, smiling benignly on the foreigner who had managed to surmount so many obstacles; but alas! his satisfaction — and mine too — were of short duration. He frowned impatiently at the brown paper. "Nee, mijnheer," he growled; "niet goed!" And he pushed papers and package and all to me, as if he was mortally offended.

"Hé, mijnheer!" I ejaculated — "Hoe is dat? Kom toch! Wat is niet goed?"

"Geen zegel! geen zegel!" he thundered magisterially, with a contemptuous toss of the brown *formulier* in my direction. Like a shot he turned to a

schoolboy of fourteen at my elbow, (who had meantime been studying my writings and reading them audibly to his companions) — “En U?” he enquired.

I felt dismissed, if not disgraced! And no investigation of my belongings could throw any light on my blunder. The brown manuscript was at fault I knew; so, as the best thing possible I entered a solemn declaration, opposite the hiernevens, “*een pakje met 7 zegels*”, and booked the same remark on a convenient spot on the white paper. This done, I returned to the charge promptly, but with much inward apprehension. The cue of people pushing forward to buy stamps and send things away and generally to transact business, had grown to a long line nearly to the door. Humbly I took my place at the end of the file, about twenty minutes off the ambtenaar. It wasn't quite twenty minutes, but it felt longer; for every now and then the ambtenaar glanced up, when he had served a customer, and his eye invariably fell on me. It was a long-drawn-out agony, that approach to the *loket*, under official inspection, so to speak; and I had plenty of time to register a silent bet with myself that the authorities were not done with me. They'd be sure to give me another journey to the stationer's.

And so they did! Without deigning to look at my official guarantee about the 7 *zegels* the Postal Rhadamanthus began with vitriolic self-restraint: "Ik — heb — U — gezegd. Er — moet — een zegel — op.

"Oh mynheer!" I burst out in hot indignation, "Hoe *kunt* U dat zeggen? Kijk! Het is allemaal zegels!" And indeed the parcel was almost completely coated with wax.

A spasm passed over his face, and he controlled himself by a severe effort. "Ik — heb — U — al — meer maal — gezegd" — His voice rose higher and higher, and he bit off the words as if they were poison. "Hier moet de afdruk van het zegel komen. — Hierr!" And he waved a white hand over the coloured *formulier* and finally dropped his thumb, like a pancake, over a lozenge-shaped diagram filled with Dutch and French words. "Hier!"

Ah yes! Just so. Now I saw what was wanted, and I departed speechlessly to the sealing-wax-shop again.

By this time I was quite domesticated there: so I took a good rest and then put on a formidable seal on the lozenge. In half an hour I was back again on the premises of Rhadamanthus, at the end

of another cue, wondering if I could reach the *loket* before it would be closed for the day. You see all that marching to and fro, and arguing with officials, and cooking sealing-wax, and waiting your turn in a crowd, swallows up an immensity of time.

At last I was before the little window and handed in the documents. "Ja, ja. De zegel is in orde!"

"*In orde*, mijnheer!" he added with a cherubic smile." "Best." "Maar — maar wat hebben we hier?" he muttered as he perused my other remarks on the papers. He appeared somewhat nonplussed by my *opmerkingen* as to the contents of package, and ran his pen through all my art criticisms; then suddenly said roughly. "Heet U Rebecca O'Neill?"

This was so unexpected a query that it threw me off my guard and I answered in English.

"Do I hate her? Oh no. On the contrary, I am sincerely attached to her. But why do you ask?"

He said "Exkuseer" and called another ambtenaar — one who talked English. This new functionary opened fire at once, "Sir, is your name Rebecca O'Neill?"

"Bless my heart", I said; "Not at all. That's my aunt."

"In that case, sir, you have sent the package

to yourself, and filled in the delarations all wrongly”

“Is there *no* way,” I said in despair, “to send this thing off? I have been all morning labouring at it, and I can’t get rid of it. Would you mind accepting it as a gift — just a little friendly gift, you know, as a token of my appreciation of the post-office arrangements? Or would there be any objection to my leaving it here lying on your desk? It’s quite harmless; perhaps even elegant — that depends on taste — but I don’t care for it any more! It’s no further use to me. Will you have it?”

“Oh hé! you mean it is of no value?”

“No value — not the least”, I said, glad to see a chance of disposing of it.

“Then you can send it off as, well — what we call — *Monster zonder waarde* — monster — monster — I remember not your English word?”

“Oh,” said I, “it is all right as it is. You don’t need it translated. ‘Monster’ is quite good English — and very expressive.”

“Then,” said he; “that is it — *Worthless Monster*. *That* must you write — on the package. Then will it cost you a dubbeltje; and it will go off at once. No wax will be needed, and no papers. No trouble of any kind.”

"I am delighted with your kindness," said I to him. "You have relieved my mind."

"Will you put the name on it now?" he enquired courteously, reaching me his own pen from behind his ear. "Please write legibly the English declaration. I shall do the Dutch for you. It must be plain."

"If you don't mind," I said, "as you are so kind, might I ask you just to write both English and Dutch?"

A glance had shown me that these curious words would have to come uncomfortably near my aunt's name; and as my aunt is rather a particular old lady with very definite notions about her own dignity, I judged it prudent that this title of distinction with which she was going to be invested should be drawn up in other handwriting than her nephew's. She had a hawk's eye and could detect every scratch I made with the pen.

"If it's not too much trouble, please put the whole declaration on it yourself. You'll find a place here", I said, turning over the unsightly object. "There's a little room left here, I think — just beside the address".

He looked it all over. It was quite true. The parcel was all a mass of red wax and "N. J.'s"

except round about the address, where we had kept the wax well off it for fear of infringing some other regulation.

"English first!" he said, making use of the vacant space.

And in Roman letters just after my aunt's name he boldly penned the mystic words, first in English, and then, in brackets, in Dutch. This is how it ran:

TO MISS REBECCA FITZGERALD O'NEILL,

Worthless Monster (zonder waarde),

WARLIN CASTLE,

KILLERY BAY

IRELAND

CONNEMARA,

After that I wouldn't touch the parcel.

I declined all further responsibility in connection with it; and, leaving it with him, retired, as from a good day's work.

As I knew my aunt, I felt sure she would appreciate the delicate compliment implied by the proximity of the postal notice to her name.

This indeed proved the case, when I visited her

later in the autumn. I draw a veil over our interview; but happily my aunt is fond of a joke, and when I told her my adventures of that morning, she laughed as she had not done for years, until I flattered myself she had forgotten the queer declaration on her package.

At the end, however, she suddenly drew herself up and, raising a reproving finger, said, "Well, it wasn't *your* writing! or I shouldn't let you off so easily, Jack. But what kind of a functionary was that, now, who would dare, in your presence, to insult your aunt?"

"In my young days a lad of spirit would have *called out* a villain like that, — yes, or a fellow that ventured on the twentieth part of such an atrocity!"

"Jack, Jack, where's your chivalry?"

"Calm yourself, my dear aunt," I retorted. "Its only that you don't catch the niceties of a translation. But you'll pick that up soon enough if you go over with me to the Hague next year."

"*Never*", said my aunt firmly.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW.

"You must not suppose," said O'Neill, after I had expressed my commiseration, "that I was always unsuccessful in my conversations and business transactions. On the contrary I have sometimes surprised myself and everybody else by the (shall I say?) aptness and readiness of my utterance — not to speak of its delicacy and point.

You smile? But listen.

This was certainly the case one day when I had an interview with an elegant young man who came to me from the Bevolkings Register Bureau.

That is the place where the authorities give themselves so much needless trouble about your address and initials, and where I had broken the

law of the land by mixing up the tinsmith with the lightning-conductor.

Well a representative of this Departement of State called upon me two days running, when I was out. The last time he came he left word that he would return next morning at 10.30 sharp; and would I please give him an interview?

I thought it wise to do so.

That unhappy blunder of mine might get me into trouble. Perhaps the officials of the Bevolkings office were going to prosecute me for conspiring to deceive the government. At all events I would be at home at 10.30; and, more than that, I would be ready for my visitor when he came.

I rose about six, and prepared for the proposed conversation as a barrister prepares his brief.

As the man who talks most has generally the situation in his own hand, I determined to keep the greater part of the conversation to myself. All the likely sentences that could possibly be of avail I copied out of the phrase-book on a sheet of foolscap. Some new expressions and idioms were added, and committed as thoroughly as possible to memory.

And, by the way, I made use of a fresh discovery — a

number of *algemeene opmerkingen* from the end of the grammar.

These were on the same lines as the material in the phrase-book, but much more learned. They were for advanced students (I was rather advanced now, so to speak,) and they had a distinct literary and scientific flavour. I went over all these, aloud — my old and favourite plan — so as to gain fluency and facility in uttering them.

Furthermore, not being able to trust my memory absolutely — there was a lot of new stuff to be mastered, you see, — I hit upon a plan to lead the conversation and keep it upon topics of my own choosing.

My strategem was of uncommon simplicity, but admirably effective for all that.

On my table I erected a kind of informal reading-desk composed of books and magazines; then in a hollow of this edifice, out of sight, I placed my manuscript notes where they could easily catch my eye. Two chairs I set carefully in position — one for myself beside my fortress, the other for my visitor in the middle of the room in a good clear light.

Then I awaited results.

At half past ten o'clock sharp there came a ring to the hall-door; and, ushered by the obsequious landlady, in walked a young fellow fashionably dressed, with languid manners and a general air being bored with life. He carried a portfolio gracefully under his arm.

Without waiting for him to begin, I went up to him the moment he entered, and shook him cordially by the hand, I relieved him of his umbrella — he had one though the weather was fine; and as his other hand was thus partially released, I shook it with no less heartiness.

"Blijdschap, mijnheer!" I began, "Blijdschap en vreugde! Het verblijdt mij zeer — U te ontmoeten! Mag ik U verzoeken Uw jas af te zetten. Wat? Nee?"

As the day was burning hot and he wore no overcoat, I didn't insist upon this.

"Zij het zoo, myn waarde! — Neem een stoel," I continued. "Ga zitten, ik bid U. Het is aangenam weer. — Volstrekt niet koud — neen — niet koud."

This was well within the mark, for it was 89° in the shade.

My Dutch seemed to surprise him for he said

feebly "Dag — Sir — Yes — I mean — O ja."

I saw he was just the kind of young man that I could have a pleasant talk with. But it was now time I got back to my notes. Before sitting down however, I asked to take charge of his hat.

"Handig mij Uw hoed over!" I said, reaching for it. When he hesitated, I put him at his ease with an "alstjeblijft; toe dan! toe!"

Though there was an interval of a second or two whilst I was getting behind my barricade he was too astonished to utter a sound, either in Dutch or in English. I perceived my advantage and intended to keep it.

"Mag ik u iets aanbieden?" I said with a wave of the hand, throwing in some nonsense out the grammar.

"Wat gebruikt U? — ah — hm — Een — *voorzetsel*, bijvoorbeeld? — of — de gebiedende wijs — of — een bijvoeglijk naamwoord? Wat — niets?"

As he still said nothing, I pointed him to my cupboards, by happy inspiration remembering the refrain of the vendor of eatables at one of the stations, "Bierr, limonade, spuitwater?" adding — "Bitterkoekjes en ijskoud bier; of — een amandel broodje?"

It was well he didn't accept, for I had none of these dainties in the house; but it sounded friendly to offer them.

"Of," I put in, sinking my voice to a confidential whisper, "Spreekt U liever over de Nieuwe Electrische Tramweg? Wel, dan. — Het publiek wordt gewaarschuwd het personeel niet in gesprek te houden."

Very faintly came the reply, as he moved restlessly on the edge of his chair, "Mynheer, ik kwam niet om de Tramweg."

"Neen?" I said. "Goed. Best. Ik neem het ook niet kwalijk, mijnheer! ik bid U welkom! — Het doet mij genoegen, na al het ongunstige weer van verleden week, U zoo goed en wel te zien."

The weather had been quite hot; but this was one of the good phrases of the book, and I stuck to it.

All this appeared to increase his panic, and he glanced at the door more than once as if he would like to make a bolt for safety.

Now I was quite in my element, and from my palissade of books I could hurl all sorts of irrelevant politenesses at him.

"Ik verwelkom U oprechtelijk, mijnheer. U bezoek is mij oorzaak van ongeveinsde blijdschap."

Holding the portfolio clenched in both hands he stared at me as if he was incapable of speech.

This seemed a favourable opportunity for putting in an *algemeene opmerking*, which I must say had all the effect of a round shot after infantry fire.

“Deugden en belooning gaan zelden te zamen,” I murmured pleasantly, with a friendly gesture of deprecation. Then in a second or two afterwards I added, — leaving him to find out the connection as best he might, — “Water bevriest op twee-en-dertig graden.”

The more outrageous the nonsense which I repeated from my notes, the paler he got.

He seemed to measure the distance between his seat and the door; but I rose and walked about the room, repeating softly to myself such phrases as I knew well, no matter what meaning they might have — “Lamaar! pas op! niet pluis, hoor! — ’t komt er niet op aan!”

Some midges were buzzing about the room. I pointed to them saying “akelige beesten, nie waar?” And making a sudden spring towards one that was approaching his head I impaled it, or rather smashed it, in the approved fashion between my hands. The fragments of the insect I displayed to him on

my palm adding triumphantly; "Dood als een pier," He was ready to go.

Layng at last a fatherly hand upon his shoulder I genially enquired, "Vergun my te vragen, jongeling, — hoe is het — met uwe — achtenswaardige ouders?"

"O ja, mijnheer", he said in a breathless whisper. "Ja zeker, mijnheer. Dank U zeer — Ik moet weg, sir. Ik heb belet — thuis — Ik moet weg — Ik zal het U zenden." —

And he was gone! gone, too, without his hat!

I was left master of the field.

Ringling the bell, I rushed to the landing and called after him, "Duizendmaal vergiffenis, Bevolkings Mijnheer! — Uw hoed!"

But that hurried him only the more swiftly down those steep stairs; and I was sincerely glad to observe that the landlady, like a good goal-keeper, had stopped him at the door, where they entered into earnest colloquy.

I had won this conversational contest; and half my amunition was not yet expended!

Eight polite sentences and about a dozen 'algemeene opmerkingen' remained unused, besides two general topics — 'boomkweekerij' and Rembrandt.

But what did he mean by 'Ik zal het U zenden?' What was it that he meant to send? I devoutly hoped there would be no further difficulty about my address, and was just trusting I had escaped, when the landlady entered with the words, "Hij moet zijn hoed hebbe." Then, as she took it in her hand, she added "Mijnheer zegt, dat het niet veilig in huis is — niet veilig, zegt mijnheer!"

"Hij vraagt ook wat de groote letter is vóór O'Neill? Of het een J of een I of een T of een F of een Y is, niemand op het kantoor kan het uitmaken, Uw handschrift is zoo onduidelijk, zegt mijnheer."

Relieved to see there was nothing worse, I went to some old copies of the 'Nieuws van den Dag,' which were lying carefully folded up on the side-table, and with a pair of scissors cut out a J from the word Juli, pasted it hastily on a sheet of notepaper and wrote underneath it, 'Met veel complimenten — en de groeten.'

Yes; the interview was decidedly successful.

Yet it pales before the fame I once got by a single sentence, just outside de Beurs-station, in Rotterdam.

I was pounced upon by an army of porters; they

had seized me and my bag, and were quarrelling loudly. I said "Hush" to the worst of them, but one brawny rascal was inclined to be insolent, and I was put upon my mettle.

"Ik bid U — houd Uwen bek," I said — "anders," — and here I glanced round for a policeman, "anders — roep ik — de Openbare Macht."

The man ran like a hare.

I pride myself that there was dignity and firmness, courtesy and local colour all in that one sentence.

And I find that it is still much admired.

CHAPTER XIII.

DUTCH CORRESPONDENCE.

The gentleman from the Bevolkings Registers Bureau had left his umbrella behind him in his hurried departure that Thursday morning, so I sent it back to him with a polite note. It would have been easy to write the polite note in English, but that would never do. After my success in carrying on a long conversation in Dutch I felt that a lapse into English would be a confession of weakness.

My reputation as a linguist could only be maintained by a real Dutch letter. Now the phrase book gave but little light on the vast subject of correspondence. Except a brief note acknowledging the arrival of a ton of coals, and a still briefer note accepting, in the third person, a formal invitation to dinner, there was nothing about letter-writing in the volume.

It was not easy to find any phrases out of these epistles suitable for working in to my note about the umbrella.

They were valuable as examples, merely for the general rhythm and style, as it were, and then only to a slight extent. As my missive was of a *genre* quite distinct from these models, I felt justified in composing it in my own way.

I wrote the letter first in English; then set about translating it, as elegantly as I could, into Dutch.

Here is the English — quite friendly, you see.

Dear Sir,

As you left your umbrella behind on Thursday morning when you did me the honour to call, I beg to send it to you by bearer, in the hope that it may reach you safely without delay.

Trusting that its absence may have occasioned you no inconvenience, I remain, dear sir,

Very truly yours

Jack O'Neill.

As a beginning, the phrase-book gave Hooggeachte Heer and Hoogedelgestrenge Heer, and many more very official-looking titles. It gave 'mijnheer' for 'sir'; but for 'dear sir' nothing at all.

Seeing, however, that *dear* was *lief* or *dierbaar*,

I could easily make out a form of friendly address: — 'Dierbare mijnheer' or briefly 'Dierbaar.'

It was a toss up, indeed whether to take the stiff title Hooggeachte Heer (for Hoogedelgestrenge Heer seemed too much of a good thing for a note about an umbrella) or this more affectionate but somewhat doubtful Dierbaar!

I finally decided on a combination, one at the beginning and one at the end.

I sailed along quite comfortably until I arrived at his '*doing me the honour to call*'. This required hammering out; and when I had tortured myself a long time over it, here is what I got: 'wanneer gij mij vereerdet door het bij mij eene visite afleggen'. Dreadfully round-about, you perceive! So I just fell back upon brevity, and trusted to luck to carry me safely through. 'Op mij te roepen', sounded terse and likely; and I chose it to avoid worse pitfalls with *door* and the infinitive.

As '*I beg*' had a brusque ring, I made it a trifle mellow and more courteous by the helpful and familiar 'verschoon mij'. 'Verschoon mij, dat ik bedel,' I could not improve on *that*.

But the proper division of 'overhandigen' into its component parts was not easy.

To get the right 'hang' of this sentence, I forcibly detached the 'over', and dragged this harmless voorzetsel well forward so as not to impede the action of its own particular verb, when you got so far. This much improved the rhythm; and I gave myself some freedom in the phrasing to keep up the style.

Indeed, after all, two or three bits of phrases could be worked in. 'Goedige aanblikken' caught my eye somewhere. I was delighted to have a kind of equivalent for *kind regards*; and eschewing the temptation to deviate into 'zuiverlijk' for *sincerely*, or 'vertrouwelijk' for *faithfully*, I finished with simple directness using 'waarachtig' for *truly*. This I afterwards thought of changing to waarempeltjes as being less formal.

Finally, to give a neat turn to the whole, I dropped in a sentence from the conversation-manual, so as to refer with a light but artistic touch to the broiling weather.

Thus the finished product assumed the following form:

Hooggeachte Heer!

Aangezien dat gij in mijn zaal laatsten Donderdag morgen Uwen regenscherm vergegeten hebt, op den datum dat gij mij de eer deedt om op mij te roepen,

en visite af te leggen, verschoon mij dat ik bedel het geabandoneerde voorwerp beleefd over aan UEdele te handigen door den drager dezes briefs.

Ik bemerkt niet eerstelijk dat de regenscherf de Uwe was; dus ik vertrouw dat gij wilt pardoneeren al het verdriet dat zijne afwezigheid veroorzaakt hebben moge.

Hoe heerlijk dat het gunstige weer van gisteren en onlangs gestadig blijft! Ik hoop van harte dat U ervan heerlijk geniet.

Koesterende den hoop dat de regenscherf zonder oponthoud U goed en wel zal bereiken,

Ik blijf,

Dierbaar,

met goedige aanblikken,
waarachtig de Uwe,

JACK O'NEILL.

EENIGE PERSBEOORDEELINGEN.

Op hoogst geestige wijze vertelde de Heer BROWN van des heeren O'Neill onverstoorbaren ijver om Hollandsch te willen spreken, en de honderden bokken, die de Brit schoot, deden de toehoorders soms onbedaarlijk lachen, vooral zijn kennismaking met den heer van het bevolkings-registerbureau, zijn onderhond met de waschvrouw bij het opmaken der waschlijst, zijn uitstapje naar den Haag, de wijze waarop hij „Have you pens” vertaalde, en de manier waarop hij zich in verschillende winkels trachtte duidelijk te maken waren hoogst amusant. Maar vooral de teekening van hetgeen daarbij voorviel en was op te merken, gaf ons humor te hooren, zooals we die slechts vinden bij DICKENS.

Het Nieuws van Zeist en Driebergen.

In de kleine zaal van het concertgebouw heeft de Heer J. IRWIN BROWN, die reeds den vorigen winter met groot succes hier ter stede een paar lezingen hield, een volle zaal vaak tot schier onbedaarlijk lachen gedwongen, door zijn lezing. En de velen die hem hoorden en zich afen toe tranen lachten, hebben den redenaar door warme toejuichingen beloond voor het genot hun verschaft,

Alg. Handelsblad.

De typische manier, waarop de Heer BROWN het Hollandsch uitsprak, alsmede zijn kalm maar hoogst humoristische wijze van voordragen „deed 't hem.” De talrijke aanwezigen gierden het telkens uit van 't lachen,

sommige gevallen waren bepaald ook uiterst amusant.

Hun die nog niet het genoegen hadden de Heer BROWN te hooren, kunnen wij zeer aanbevelen zulks te gaan doen.

Telegraaf.

Behalve zijn liefde voor de Engelsche literatuur, bezit de Heer BROWN ook den kostelijken humor die zoo speciaal Britsch is, dien humor zonder eenige pretentie, maar daarom juist zoo onweerstaanbaar.

Verslag te geven van deze voordracht is ondoenlijk. Men moet die zelf hooren om mee te schateren van 't lachen.

Rotterdamsch Nieuwsblad.

Dms. BROWN heeft ook ditmaal weder veel succes gehad en wij zouden niet weten wat meer te prijzen: zijn schoone „dictie” van verzen, of de geestige manier, waarop hij „a Briton's Difficulties in mastering Dutch” behandelde. Het laatste bracht de lachspieren heftig in beweging en bij elken „blunder” van den Brit schaterde het publiek het uit.

Van harte hopen wij, dat het Haarlemsche publiek het volgend jaar nog eens in de gelegenheid zal worden gesteld dezen begaafden spreker te hooren.

Haarlemsche Courant.

„ . . . Aan velen in den lande zijn de stukjes, hier in een bundel verzameld, reeds bekend, want de Heer BROWN heeft ze op verschillende plaatsen voorgedragen. In een aantal recensies van die voordrachten wordt gewag gemaakt van het onbedaarlijk gelach, dat de voordrager er mee verwekte. Het is ons bij de lezing niet anders vergaan. We konden ons telkens niet houden van het

lachen. Het boekje is inderdaad vol onweerstaanbare vis comica.”

Nieuwe Rotterd. Courant.

. . . Van af de eerste tot de laatste bladzijde spreekt er uit het boekje een schat van gezonden, ongezochten humor, afgewisseld door tal van rake opmerkingen, over misbruiken in onze spreektaal binnengeslopen en zoo ge-acclimatiseerd. dat we ze nauwelijks meer bemerkten. Zelfs NURKS zaliger nagedachtenis zou het bezit van lachspieren gemerkt hebben, wanneer hem ooit de conversatie tusschen O'NEILL en den heer van 't bevolkingsregister ware medegedeeld.

Als 't waar is, dat lachen een genezenden invloed op zieken uitoefent, wagen we „An Irishman's difficulties with the Dutch language” als universeel-geneesmiddel aan te bevelen, op gevaar af, ons schuldig te maken aan onbevoegd uitoefenen der geneeskunde

De Telegraaf.

. . . . Het is een boekje vooral geschikt voor kniesooren en droefgeestigen. Ze zullen er van opknappen.

De Nederlander.

. . . . Laten ze lachen om het prachtige Hollandsche waschlijstje om den bliksemafleider en om de „kwast” in het cafétje, allen tot mistificaties worden, lachen om zooveel andere dingen, als de moeilijkheden met den postambtenaar, bij het verzenden van een postpakketje of het gesprek met den man van het bevolkingsregister, lachen om het kostelijke briefje waarmee het boekje besluit . . .

„*De Nieuwe Courant*”.

